

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A JESUIT PARISH?



What does it mean that St. Thomas More is a Jesuit parish? For starters, it means that the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has entrusted the care of STM to the care of the Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). The Jesuits are the largest international Catholic religious order of men. We were founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola and approved by the Holy See (Pope Paul III) in 1540. We are probably best known for our schools. In the U.S. we have over 25 Jesuit colleges and universities (such as Marquette, Creighton, Loyola Chicago, Boston College, Fordham, Georgetown, Xavier, and Gonzaga) and over 50 high schools as well as Nativity Middle Schools and parish grade schools like ours. We also have retreat houses like Demontreville here in the Twin Cities and parishes like ours.

The Jesuits have a unique spirituality based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius often referred to as *Ignatian Spirituality*. Different Catholic religious orders like the Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines and Jesuits emphasize different aspects of the Gospel based on the spirituality of their founder. Franciscans emphasize poverty, Dominicans preaching, Benedictines hospitality.

Jesuits emphasize discernment – discovering God’s will for us as individuals and as a community. St. Ignatius had a deep belief that God speaks directly to us in our hearts and souls. He believed that if we are attentive to God’s voice within, we can discern God’s call to us. Our parish discernment about how we could respond to the needs of immigrants was a good example of how we as a parish tried to hear and respond to God’s call to us in our time and place.

Following on this, a personal relationship with Jesus is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality. If we are to hear Christ’s call to us, we need to have a personal relationship with him. That’s why as a Jesuit parish we offer spiritual direction and retreat opportunities to deepen our relationship with Christ and be attentive to his workings in our lives.

Ignatian spirituality is very *world-affirming*. One of St. Ignatius’ key phrases was *finding God in all things*. He was keenly aware of God’s presence in the world – in people, historical events, nature, science, the arts, mathematics, literature, drama. As a result, Ignatian spirituality is very *hopeful* – seeing God active in the world. It is our job to discern God’s activity in the world and in our lives and then to work in harmony with God’s action and direction.

Ignatian spirituality calls us to be *Women and Men for Others* – people of service. That’s God’s primary call to us. As a result, a Jesuit parish offers opportunities to help others in need and serve the poor whether it be parishioners in need, victims of natural disasters, or immigrants.

Ignatian spirituality sees working for justice in our world as an essential expression of our Gospel faith. A Jesuit parish is involved in local, national, and global justice issues. We are called to work for justice.

The Jesuits have a strong intellectual tradition as seen by all of the schools we run around the world. Many Jesuits and our lay colleagues have advanced degrees and are scholars. A Jesuit parish should have *spiritual and intellectual depth*. Many people come to a Jesuit parish expecting spiritual and intellectual depth in the homilies and faith formation programs.

Jesuit parishes are called to *evangelize* – reach out beyond our parish boundaries. We are meant to do more than offer the sacraments to those who come to us. We are to reach out beyond our parish walls and registered members to the unchurched, the fallen away, spiritual seekers, people on the margins. As Pope Francis tells us, we are meant to get the “smell of the sheep” from going out among them, seeking out the lost sheep as Jesus did.

There is much more that could be said, but hopefully this gives a flavor of what it means to be a Jesuit parish. We are first and foremost Catholic but with a unique take on the Gospel based on the spirituality of our founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola, which emphasizes how God is calling us to serve in unique ways.